

# What Is Oral Cancer?



Cancer is a number of diseases caused by the abnormal growth of cells. Sometimes cells grow out of control, divide and form masses known as tumors.

## **Facts on Oral Cancer**

Oral cancer accounts for only 3 percent of all cancers. It is treatable when detected early by your dentist. If treated promptly, there is a very good chance that it can be cured. More than 90 percent of oral cancers are squamous cell cancers, which develop in the lining or covering of the mouth, lips, tongue, and throat. It can also be spread through the lymph nodes and into the neck.

## **Signs, Symptoms & Early Detection**

The most common sign of oral cancer is a sore which does not heal and bleeds easily. A lump or thickening in the mouth or white patches which last longer than two weeks, difficulty in chewing or swallowing food and the inability to move the tongue freely can also be signs of oral cancer.

Dentists can detect oral cancer during routine preventive care examinations. Dental x-rays or radiographs are the only way your dentist can see if tumors are present in your jaw and beneath the gum surface. We recommend a preventive care examination every 6 months and dental radiographs every 12-24 months.

## **Guarding against oral cancer**

- Avoid exposure to strong direct sunlight. Those who must be in the sun should use a hat and sunscreen.
- Have regular preventive care dental examinations.
- Any jagged teeth or irritating dentures should be fixed.
- Any white patch, lump or scaly area on the lips or in the mouth that lasts longer than two weeks should be checked by your dentist.
- Don't use tobacco in any form. Don't smoke cigarettes, cigars, or pipes, or use chewing tobacco or snuff.
- If you drink alcohol, drink only in moderation.